

“Great Hope and Great Faith and Mainly Determination”:
The Survival of the Cleveland Community Project in a Climate of Failure,
1964-1965

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Steven Edward Beha II

The Ohio State University
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Project Advisor: Professor Mitchell Lerner, Department of History

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Introduction

“Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope--some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity. This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort.”¹ Those words were spoken by President Lyndon B. Johnson to a joint session of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate during his State of the Union Address on January 8, 1964. In that speech Johnson asked Congress to wage a “war on poverty” because not all Americans had been given a fair chance to earn a livable income. Moreover, the President solicited not only the help of Congress, but also the help of “all Americans.” Some of those Americans included a radical group of college students that had been engaged in battles against poverty almost four months before the federal government declared the need for a war.

That group of students was part of an organization titled the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and they had authorized their Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) during their September 1963 National Council meeting. ERAP was designed to organize the poor population within urban communities to combat the sources that created their impoverished environment. The goal of ERAP was to organize the poor, Whites and Blacks together, against the political system that had abandoned them. ERAP chapters were established in urban centers such as Chicago, Newark, and Boston and some rural areas like Hazard, Kentucky. Some ERAP chapters were

¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union.” (January 8, 1964). The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26787> Accessed on January 28, 2008.

successful in organizing community conferences and developing relationships within the poor communities; unfortunately, the national ERAP portion of SDS only lasted until the summer of 1965 when sources of money dried up and anti-war sentiments took over the ideology of the student organization.

Historical View

Some historians argue that goal of organizing poor communities to achieve a political voice was never reached. The effectiveness and eventual demise of ERAP has been researched by historians as well as published members of SDS. Allen Matusow argues that ERAP was doomed from the start because the middle-class students leading the movement into the poor neighborhoods were fighting the wrong fight. Many leaders of SDS believed that the poor would be able to see the larger political picture with their intervention. The truth was that the poor were “less interested in attacking corporate capitalism than in getting their garbage collected.”² Milton Viorst gives the students a little more credit, but still labels ERAP a failure. He contends that ERAP was a success as an experiment in participatory democracy and created “effective institutions” that threatened the economic power structure. According to Viorst, their ultimate failure was due to the overwhelming power of the elitist hierarchy and the political weakness of the ERAP national office.³

Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden were two early leaders of SDS and were important to both the ideological foundation and the destruction of ERAP. Hayden believed that ERAP was a way for SDS to put words into action, but his commitment to the anti-war movement eventually diverted his energies. After a trip to Hanoi, Hayden believed it was

² Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 315.

³ Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 191.

time for SDS to abandon the poor communities and return to campuses to organize the frustrated students. He claimed a lack of resources was the reason that SDS could not “devote significant energy both to the ERAP projects and to ending the Vietnam War.”⁴ Gitlin also maintained that the Vietnam War drained much of the energy from community organizing, but he believed that it was more ideological energy than physical energy. Many of the founders of SDS were out of graduate school by the time the anti-war movement became prevalent and the new intellectuals that had risen to leadership roles in SDS and devalued the ideas of the founders. Many of the “Old Guard” remained in some of the ERAP programs, but they had lost “coherence and traction” within the student movement just as the ERAP programs had themselves.⁵

Statement of Thesis

One such ERAP chapter was located in Cleveland, Ohio. Unlike most ERAP chapters, it lasted more than the two years of the national program. If one looks at the Cleveland ERAP chapter it is possible to find small victories of political voice that may have been consolidated to create a thriving, self-sufficient organization to mobilize Cleveland’s poor community. Unemployment councils, a community theater, and a welfare mother’s association are a few of the accomplishments that remained in Cleveland after ERAP was dismantled nationally. At this one site, the organizers learned from the poor and adjusted their plans accordingly to create lasting programs and relationships. The impact those students and organizers had on the poor communities of Cleveland cannot be measured by the fiscal failure of ERAP; rather, they should be judged by the successes they produced in spite of insufficient human and financial

⁴ Thomas Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 211.

⁵ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1987), 369.

resources. It is hard to quantify how ERAP in Cleveland influenced the poor community over a long period of time. However, the evidence that has survived indicates that in the short period of time that the student organizers were in Cleveland, welfare mothers gained a political voice, the students were accepted as equal members of the poor community, and the seeds were planted for future activism and social change.⁶

Background

SDS as an organization was an invention of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), and the labor movements of the early twentieth century. At that time, LID funded a student organization called the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) and therefore greatly influenced the young, social-democratic leaders of the 1910's and 1930's. In the early part of 1960, SLID decided that the name of the organization was noticeably oriented to labor and decided it was time for a change of name as well as a change of philosophy. In January of 1960, SLID changed its name to SDS, which signified their first break from the old left and the restraints of apathy that students had tolerated while they were linked to the labor movements.⁷

The Port Huron Statement

Al Haber, a graduate student at the University of Michigan, provided the leadership for the newly radicalized student organization, and Tom Hayden, a talented reporter for the University of Michigan student newspaper, provided the ideological ideas for the future of SDS. Hayden was burdened with writing a mission statement for the 1962 SDS convention at Port Huron, Michigan and wanted to present a manifesto to

⁶ Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 12 and 31-33.

⁷ Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York, New York: Random House, 1973), 15-17.

inspire a generation of college students. After a couple months of drafting the manifesto to represent the new direction for student activism, Hayden and Haber presented *The Port Huron Statement* to a group of fifty nine students at the convention. After much debate and revision, *The Port Huron Statement* provided the New Left with an ideological bond that united the participants and positioned the students to influence the foundations of democracy.⁸

The idea of participatory democracy was central to *The Port Huron Statement* and was the main political statement made by Haber and Hayden. With the acceptance of the SDS manifesto, the members agreed to push toward a society that would allow every person not only a voice in government representation but also an individual ability to effect changes deemed necessary to society. Hayden refused to believe that only a privileged few men could control an entire population of individuals. Instead, he said, “Independence can be a fact about ordinary people. And democracy, real participating democracy, rests on the independence of ordinary people.”⁹ Hayden considered *The Port Huron Statement* as a document that transformed the group of SDS members at Port Huron, Michigan in 1962 from “a wandering tribe” to a group that had articulated “its first authentic words to a wider world.”¹⁰

The *Port Huron Statement* was only the beginning of a new organization with a new inspiration. Following that meeting at Port Huron, SDS assumed the position of the student organization that gave radical groups on campuses throughout the country a national voice. However, the need for that national voice meant that SDS needed to

⁸ Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, 311-313.

⁹ Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968* (South Hadley, Massachusetts: J. F. Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1982), 57.

¹⁰ Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir*, 102.

establish a national office to oversee and delegate the functions of the organization from a central location. Paradoxically, the bureaucracy that was essential to the success of a national organization was at the core of what SDS wanted to fight against. Structurally, they had become a common organization out of necessity with the National Office (NO) at the top of their hierarchy and local administrators below to organize the campuses. The reality of monetary problems and the need for a bureaucratic regime required to run a national student organization stifled the hopes of SDS's leading ideologues. Many wondered how SDS was to work outside of the institutions it intended to change.¹¹

Funding Direct Action

In the spring of 1963, with Hayden as President, SDS founded Peace Research and Education Project (PREP) as an attempt to turn some of their ideas into action. However, most of their effort was spent writing research and position papers instead of providing society with real prospects for change. The organization had received its marching orders from the Port Huron conference the year prior, but nothing of substance had developed from the grand ideas put forth. Because of this, SDS went into its National Convention at Pine Hill, New York in the summer of 1963 with constrained frustration.¹²

During the convention at Pine Hill, Paul Potter delivered a speech that embodied the tone of the previous year's disappointments. Potter claimed that many people were shouting words of change at the institutions they were fighting, but still hanging onto the system because they were scared of the changes that action could bring. He proposed that SDS, as an organization, not only speak of change, but incite change through "direct

¹¹ Sale, *SDS*, 74-82.

¹² James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987), 173-177 and Sale, *SDS*, 82-90.

participation.”¹³ The convention as a whole promoted a change in thought and direction of SDS and ended with an election of national officers. Hayden did not seek re-election and many of the original members of SDS felt that the need for change meant a change in leadership. Three men were selected for nominated for president: Paul Potter, Rennie Davis, and Todd Gitlin. As a recent graduate of Harvard, Gitlin reluctantly accepted the position. He had never been a member of SDS and only went to the convention to learn about the group and share ideas among people he barely knew. It was this change in leadership that vaulted SDS from an organization of ideas to an organization driven to action.¹⁴

Earlier that year, Hayden had put into motion a plan to begin organizing a “program of campus education on labor and economic issues.” Hayden knew that the program needed funding to become functional, so he reached out to a group that SDS had some contact with, the United Auto Workers (UAW). SDS had sympathizers within the UAW, specifically Irving Bluestone and Mildred Jeffrey, and needed to capitalize on the potential financial backing of the UAW. Hayden wrote a letter to Walter Reuther, President of the (UAW) on March 29, 1963 that marked the monetary beginnings of an action oriented project to infiltrate the poor communities across America.¹⁵

Hayden originally proposed economic and labor education for SDS chapters on fifty college campuses. His hope was to construct a project that included six points: Regional and national conferences related to economic issues; labor and economic issues becoming a priority for other student groups; distribution of educational materials;

¹³ Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 178.

¹⁴ Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 104-105.

¹⁵ Thomas Hayden, Letter to Walter Reuther, (March 29, 1963), Oberlin College, Seeley G. Mudd Learning Center, SDS Records micro-film, series 2B [hereafter “SDS-2B”], reel 17, number 141.

research groups focusing on economic issues; job opportunities; and a new student-labor relationship. The budget Hayden proposed to Reuther consisted of two staff members and travel expenses totaling \$7,500 and was to be implemented in the summer to prepare for recruitment starting with the upcoming school year. Reuther responded with a letter on July 31, 1963 stating the interest the UAW had in the success of SDS, and enclosed a check for \$5,000 from the UAW to be used towards Hayden's proposed economic organizing program.¹⁶

After the money was received in July, Hayden and newly elected Gitlin needed a group upon whom to focus their economic programs. They began by courting unemployed black and white youths who seemed to be the most radical of the poor communities. The reinvigorated Al Haber returned to run the program and the central office was stationed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Hayden, Gitlin, and Potter as well as a few others formed the executive committee with Mildred Jeffrey's daughter, Sharon Jeffrey. To please the labor-oriented financier, the UAW, and the traditional, educated participants, student members of SDS, they named their program the Economic Research and Action Project.¹⁷

Hayden-Haber Debate

Haber quickly stated his ideas of what ERAP's purpose was and where its influence was to be focused, many of which he had taken from earlier labor movements. In his view, ERAP was needed because automation and new technology had eliminated jobs and a few corporations dominated the major markets. The use of new technology began to contradict the idea of full employment because increased growth no longer

¹⁶ Ibid, and Walter P. Reuther, Letter to Thomas Hayden, (July 31, 1963), SDS-2B, reel 17, number 141.

¹⁷ Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 187, and Sale, *SDS*, 102.

meant more jobs. He argued that the 1963 unemployment rate of 6% could be multiplied four times over and it would not affect the new automated production system. The economic system that had rewarded work with income could not be maintained if there was not enough work provided in the first place. His proposal was to implement a student-labor coordinating committee on every campus where SDS was present. Every program he proposed centered on the need for student involvement and ERAP's support of campus education and research.¹⁸

Haber also had an ally for his point-of-view, Steve Max. Max had been an activist in New York City and had initially disagreed with Hayden's manifesto for SDS. He believed it was utopian and did not provide a concrete path to guide SDS. Max understood the importance of students leading the fight against poverty and argued that they were the only group that stood for change and could break away from the past organizations that had failed. He believed that poor communities had the ability to influence their economic environment, but they needed an outside influence such as SDS to make them realize their own self-worth and guide their actions for change. He blamed previous groups for not doing enough: the American Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the American organized left. He thought these groups had great opportunities to lead the fight against poverty, but had failed to garner the political power needed to make real changes.¹⁹

On the role of students, Max agreed with Haber. The solution, he believed, came in the form of middle-class student attitudes. He argued that if the poor had created their

¹⁸ Al Haber, "SDS Economic Research and Action Project: An Introductory Statement," [1963], SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

¹⁹ Sale, *SDS*, 45, and Steve Max, "Words Butter No Parsnips: Remarks on the Nature of Community Political Organization," [Date Unknown], 1, SDS-2B, reel 10, number 6.

situation and had no political power, then they were their own worst enemy. Therefore, SDS could not rely on the poor to create a better society on their own. It would take the action of students to influence the higher powers of government in order to create a change in the community's environment. Max believed the power rested in politics and without middle-class students entering that arena, the poor would never have the wherewithal to improve their conditions.²⁰

While Haber was busy building support on college campuses, Hayden was enthralled by an idea that had been proposed by Potter at Pine Hill: to leave the campuses behind and work with the people that were directly experiencing the economic problems. Hayden saw ERAP as an original idea that should not be stalemated by the geographical constraints and time limitations that were common to campus oriented programs. He expected that economic change would only occur when the students injected themselves into the poor communities and rejected the comforts of college campuses. He admitted there was no clear strategy on how to develop a coalition with the poor communities, but he stressed that there needed to be a movement of an entire class of people, not just the radical students. He also raised the question of the sources of ERAP funding, asking from which sources it should be accepted. He never entirely answered that question; however, he proposed that it should be discussed and debated because some powerful organizations used their money to nudge student groups in the direction of issues that benefited the donor.²¹

Hayden had combined his efforts with an "impressive" Swarthmore College student named Carl Wittman and produced a paper that supported his ideas of leaving the

²⁰ Max, *Words Butter No Parsnips*, 2-3.

²¹ Tom Hayden, "Memo to all the guys on ERAP," [1963], 5, 12-13, 14, SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

campus. Wittman had led economic demonstrations and organized economic improvement groups in Chester, Pennsylvania. He had first-hand knowledge of the results that could be expected from organizing within the poor communities, and the hardships involved in gaining the trust of the community. Their paper was entitled, “(Toward) An Interracial Movement of the Poor?” and it made the case that economic organizing had to be flexible. It had to be able to service all the poor and all their problems, not just the ones that academics thought were important. It also stressed the need to organize across racial lines because poverty affected all people, not just Black or Whites as individual groups. This was another reason for flexibility and the push to integrate common economic interests. Their paper was widely distributed and read before the December, 1963 National Conference was held in New York.²²

What happened in New York during the 1963 SDS National Conference was critical for how SDS was to proceed regarding community and campus organizing. Haber and Hayden were caught in a flood of questions concerning their views of where SDS and ERAP were headed. Haber stressed the need for more research on campuses and more position papers written to influence the politicians and professionals to organize and listen to the people in poor neighborhoods. Hayden combated Haber’s position and argued that ERAP needed to expand into the ghettos in order to understand the needs and the concerns of the poor communities. Finally, in ERAP, SDS had an action oriented plan rather than just words.²³

The “Hayden-Haber Debate” was later recognized as a debate between theory and action. Hayden wanted SDS to become a radical organization centered on action and

²² Hayden, Reunion, 126 and Sale, *SDS*, 103-106

²³ Sale, *SDS*, 106-107

revolutionary change while Haber saw SDS as a small fraction of the movement and believed the organization should only do what they were expected to do and stay within their means. Haber believed that SDS was only a small part of a large movement, and Hayden believed that they were the heart and soul of the movement. Haber had kept his connections to LID and the Old Left and therefore he did not believe that SDS had any responsibility other than organizing students on college campuses. Hayden saw a new set of responsibilities and opportunities for SDS and the New Left. He did not have any ties to the Old Left and continued to work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was composed of Black students, to bridge any impasses between their races and to tackle the economic issues that affected them both. Hayden did more than build a bridge between the two groups, he used the organizational structure of SNCC and applied it to SDS and wanted to implement SNCC's ideas of how to live equally among the people ERAP wished to organize.²⁴

Hayden later wrote that "Haber strongly opposed the ERAP" and "he felt it was still more important to prepare people to be radicals in their professional careers." Hayden felt that Haber and the old intellectual notions were holding SDS back from becoming an active force in the war on poverty. Hayden wanted to bring the ideas of race and poverty to the forefront of public thought that was fixated on the Cold War.²⁵ Hayden's new course of action was approved by the Executive Committee of SDS and Rennie Davis was put in charge of ERAP, replacing Haber. Sharon Jeffrey remarked

²⁴ Jennifer Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor*, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 17-18.

²⁵ Hayden, *Reunion*, 125.

that, “It wasn’t easy for Al [Haber]. So all of a sudden he was going to be left out. He was no longer going to be a leader.”²⁶

The Economic Committee and Cleveland

This was the ideological environment in which ERAP continued to operate for the next two years. In January of 1964, there was a meeting of the Economic Committee of the National Council to decide what the operational problems were in expanding into communities that had been researched the previous year. This meeting marked the beginning of a new era in the history of ERAP. There was no longer talk of *what* to do, but rather *how* to do it. One main problem the committee discovered was the lack of interest within the unemployed Whites to organize themselves. They discovered that Whites did not feel that their unemployment was a social issue, as the Blacks did. They depended on the promise of a better economy and tax cuts to elevate their status. Though some committee members wanted a long-term solution to this problem, Rennie Davis decided the only way to be successful was to plan one week at a time and gain input from the local ERAP chapters as they reported on their accomplishments and failures.²⁷

Due to previous research done within many urban communities, Davis and the others on the Executive Committee had a decent idea of what they were facing: Staff shortages were universal, Baltimore was having problems with unions, Chicago’s small staff was not adequately trained to organize outside of college campuses, Philadelphia’s chapter was struggling to integrate into their poor community, and many were having problems identifying staff members who were both hard working and agreed with the principles of SDS and ERAP. As the newest city to be considered for an ERAP program,

²⁶ Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 190-191

²⁷ Executive Committee, “Meeting of Economic Committee of the National Council,” (January 16, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

Cleveland had not been as well scouted as the other communities. The only problem listed for the Cleveland project during the Economic Committee meeting was the lack of cohesiveness between people in the poor neighborhoods. Many poor tenants, for example, were informing their landlords of problems with other poor tenants instead of working with each other to create a fair and decent housing situation.²⁸

Birth of the CCP

After the conclusion of the Economic Committee's meeting, Lee Webb, SDS's National Secretary, received a letter from a Case Western Reserve medical student living in Cleveland. His name was Oliver (Ollie) Fein and he had attended the SDS National Conference in December. He was writing to pay the dues he owed and to request position papers that had been presented at the conference. Within that letter, Fein discussed the plans he and his soon to be wife Charlotte Phillips had for the summer in Cleveland's poor communities. He felt that the Black community was already starting to move towards rebellion and the idea of organizing was beginning to appeal to the White community. He asked, "Would you be able to suggest any source of funds that might sponsor such a drive?"²⁹

The Feins, Visits, and Uncertainties

Webb immediately forwarded the letter to Davis, stating that Fein was a good friend of Carl Wittman and that Cleveland "would be a good place for a project, as no other organization is working in the city."³⁰ He then replied to Fein thanking him for his interest and stating that SDS was starting to establish projects in Northern cities. Without

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ollie Fein, Letter to Lee Webb, (January 18, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 89. [Because of the extensive amount of Cleveland ERAP records I used on the SDS Records micro-film, "reel 14, number 89" will hereafter be "Cleveland"]

³⁰ Ibid.

promising any future commitment, Webb asked Fein to write back in a month to confirm his interest. Later that same month, Fein also received a letter from ERAP expressing interest in the Cleveland area and suggesting that he attend a conference at the University of Michigan in April that was sponsored by ERAP and PREP. The purpose of the conference was to provide the attendees with knowledge of how to find the source of economic problems in poverty stricken areas and how to organize the poor population to fight those causes. The letter also stated the possible involvement of students from Oberlin College and the desire of Davis to meet with Ollie to discuss staffing and monetary needs.³¹

At the beginning of February, Carl Wittman paid a visit to his friend, Fein, in Cleveland and compiled a report about the possibility of starting an ERAP program there. He reported that the West of Cleveland was predominately White, while the East was mostly Black. Ollie and Charlotte had become active members in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which was a group concerned with integration and fair housing for Blacks. Ollie and Charlotte had tried to influence CORE to fight the power structure suppressing the area rather than the equally poor Whites in Cleveland, but CORE had responded to the Civil Rights Movement and began organizing around issues only on the predominately Black East Side of Cleveland. Though Ollie and Charlotte were excited about possibly leading ERAP in Cleveland, they did not want to make a commitment through the end of the summer because of their uncertainty about continuing medical

³¹ Nanci Hollander, Letter to Mr. Ollie Fein, (January 23, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

school. Wittman questioned the viability of a program in Cleveland if Ollie was not there to lead it and stated that maybe it “should be confined mostly to research.”³²

Ollie and Charlotte also had other concerns. While they felt that they were gaining some support from local students and “friends of students,” they still had questions about how much they should involve the East Side Black community in a summer ERAP chapter. They also did not want to be confined by a summer-long commitment to ERAP.³³ Davis kept his promise and visited Cleveland during the days of February 29 and March 1, 1964. He talked to Ollie and Charlotte about their plans concerning medical school but they did not budge on their inability to commit to the program for any lengthy period of time.³⁴

Even though the Feins and Wittman were skeptical about the success of ERAP in Cleveland, Davis remained positive. The amount of mail he received at the ERAP office in Ann Arbor was overbearing at times. People were committing to all the projects and he even had “ten people for the Cleveland project.” He proclaimed his excitement by writing that “ERAP is spinning upward,” and “We’re sitting on dynamite.” Davis’s excitement was contagious and the Feins agreed to help start the Cleveland project, but again with no promises of staying all summer.³⁵

Sharon Jeffrey

The Feins’ uncertainty prompted Davis to write to Webb and express his desire to hire a full time director for Cleveland before June. In his report, Davis articulated his

³² Carl Wittman, “Report on Visit to Cleveland: February 1-2, 1964,” [February 1964], SDS-2-B, Cleveland.

³³ Ollie and Charlotte Fein, Letter to Rennie Davis, Paul Booth, Tom Hayden, Steve Max, and all ERAPers, (February 16, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

³⁴ Rennie Davis, Letter to Mr. Lee D. Webb III, (March 2, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

³⁵ Rennie Davis, Letter to Carey McWilliams and Ollie Fein, (March 12, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

desire to establish a program in Cleveland and he was mostly positive about its success. Davis expressed the male dominant ideas of SDS by assuming the organizer was to be a man; “*He* would be assisted by students,” and “*He* would make arrangements for a conference,” were just a couple of gender specific remarks he made concerning the position. However, Davis and Webb filled that position with a veteran of SDS, a woman named Sharon Jeffrey.³⁶

Jeffrey was the daughter of Mildred Jeffrey, who was a Democratic Party committeewoman and a leader of the UAW. Sharon was one of the first people Haber recruited when he took over SLID and she was at the first SDS convention in 1960 as a sophomore at Michigan University. She was the one who initially recruited Rennie Davis to SDS and became a lifelong organizer. Jeffrey did not want to work with the strong, male personalities of Hayden and Gitlin in Newark and Chicago, respectively; so, when the opportunity came for her to take over ERAP in Cleveland, she immediately took it and drove to meet with the Feins in April 1964.³⁷

The Feins and Jeffrey combined their efforts and produced a prospectus for the Cleveland project. Listed in the prospectus was Cleveland’s estimated expenses and staffing needs. Beginning in late May and running for eleven weeks, they estimated the need for twelve full time people and an estimated budget of \$5590. That included \$30 per week for the full time staff members. For the next nine months (September through June), they estimated a need for only three full time people and a budget of \$7290. The full time staff was decreased because of the hope that there would be more student volunteers during the school year and each full time staff member was paid \$40 per week.

³⁶ Davis, Letter to Mr. Lee D. Webb III, (March 2, 1964).

³⁷ Hayden, *Reunion*, 30-30, Gitlin, *Sixties*, 366, and Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 192.

The total budget from May to the next June was \$12,880. The purpose of the ERAP in Cleveland, the prospectus stated, was to find common economic problems between the poor Blacks and the poor Whites, and to make one unified organization to fight poverty in their communities.³⁸

Before Cleveland was established as a permanent ERAP, the potential staff members were sent to a SDS sponsored conference to train new members on how they approached community organizing and staffing needs. It was held in Ann Arbor on April 10, 11, and 12 of 1964 and was called the Conference on Community Organizing for Economic Issues. The purpose of the conference was to bring everyone together who had been involved or was going to be involved in community organizing and share ideas and methods. SDS wanted to recruit people who were active in the Peace Movement, comfortable living among the poor, and involved in local governmental processes. They wanted to start the conversation about a national economic policy while still designing plans for individual programs that summer and fall. They understood that the White, middle-class college students were beginning to turn their attention away from SNCC and the question of racial inequality and instead focused on the more general problem of “poverty in the midst of abundance.”³⁹

After the conference, Jeffrey had more time to explore and research the community with which she was to work so closely. However, in May she did not share Davis’s positive outlook on the Cleveland situation. She remarked,

I have learned lots about the white community in my short time and about unemploy[ment] – but it is dam[n] as hell to develop a program. The white poor

³⁸ Unknown, “ERAP Prospectus: Cleveland”, [1964], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 97.

³⁹ Unknown, “Conference on Community Organizing for Economic Issues”, [1964], SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

represent but a minor minor part of the total city population, [such] that a movement of the interracial poor is highly unlikely. Well, we shall see.⁴⁰

At the end of May, the expense report shared Jeffrey's pessimistic outlook. Cleveland ERAP had only been partially operational for a month and already they were estimating that they were going to be facing a deficit of \$365.50 at the end of ten weeks.⁴¹

First Problems: Recruitment and Money

Ollie Fein drafted a recruitment letter to increase the number of volunteers for the Cleveland project. A copy of it was received at the NO on May 11, 1964 and it was approved for distribution. In it, Ollie laid out the purpose of the Cleveland project and what it needed to succeed. He believed that it required at least five to seven more participants, but out of the fifteen applications they had received there were few qualified for an experimental, communal ERAP program. He felt it was essential that Cleveland have a more experienced staff and required that all applicants go to the SDS convention and training session in New York, June 7 through 14, 1964. He explained that the first purpose of the Cleveland project was to build a community organization among the poor Whites in the Near West Side (NWS) of Cleveland and then to expand it into the East Side community and the entire population of impoverished people. Finally, he wanted all participants to raise at least \$100 before they arrived in Cleveland. He understood the financial difficulties the Cleveland project was going to face, but he also understood that having money and no staff was useless. Therefore, he merely suggested the applicant try

⁴⁰ Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to Steve Max, (May 4, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁴¹ Unknown, "Cleveland Budget as of May 25, 1964", [1964], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 96.

to bring the \$100, but he made it clear that he wanted them to come even if they did not raise the money.⁴²

A short letter to Jeffrey from the NO exclaimed that, "I did it. Stole \$200 to get you guys over the first hump. But I figure that if we steal enough, we can probably overturn a lot of governments. So let me know if you need more."⁴³ Perhaps it was what they needed to jump start the Cleveland program, but there were whispers of financial trouble in the ERAP national office. The fiscal situation was beginning to deteriorate, and staffing problems were becoming apparent throughout the organization.

Organizing

After the SDS National Convention in June of 1964, Paul Potter, who was working in the Cleveland project, was elected President. The SDS National Council convened on June 16, 1964 to discuss the direction and focus of SDS and ERAP as a national venture. Potter still held that ERAP was the vehicle to carry SDS into direct action, but he now faced the problem of possibly pulling SDS people from organizing on campuses to help with the understaffed community organizations. To the contrary, some members of the National Committee felt that people should be pulled from struggling ERAP programs to help SDS campus organizations if it was needed.⁴⁴

Internal Troubles

The next troubling subject for ERAP was the topic of conversion. Many thought that the conversion of students into radical activists was the job of PREP. However, there was a small contingency that believed that ERAP should pull some of its focus from

⁴² Ollie Fein, Letter to Applicants, (May 9, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁴³ Unknown, Letter to Sharon Jeffrey, (May 28, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁴⁴ Unknown, "National Council Meeting", (June 16, 1964), 26, SDS Records micro-film, series 2A, reel 3, number 10.

organizing communities and transfer it to converting students on campuses to the movement against poverty. Many thought that PREP needed to focus on research as well as writing literature for the movement while ERAP was responsible for the recruitment of students by showing them into the communities they intended to affect by the movement. Again there was a split between those wanting to separate ERAP from college campuses and those wanting it to remain there and recruit. The National Council finally decided that ERAP and PREP were to remain separate because their issues of economics and peace were too diverse to combine.⁴⁵

The final issue concerning ERAP was the way in which it was to hold its conferences. Members of the National Council thought that ERAP needed to combine its conference with the SDS National Conference. Potter motioned that the two conferences would be held simultaneously, with the first part of the conference to emphasize ERAP evaluation and the second part dedicated to the organizational purposes of SDS. He wanted ERAP members to have some involvement in campus discussions, but not to have any wide-ranging impact on the general trends of SDS. His motion failed and a new motion was passed by Barbara Steinberg, a member of the NO, which stated the conferences should not be held concurrently.⁴⁶

The motion passed with the help of Jeffrey who said that many people cared about both ERAP and SDS, and they should not be expected to pick which one they cared for more. She also stated that it was important for ERAP people to meet alone and not be influenced by SDS campus organizers. Therefore, she proposed, there should be an ERAP Institute followed by a SDS Convention within a short distance and time period to

⁴⁵ Ibid, 38-40.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 47-49.

provide easier access for those involved in both. Thus, the ERAP National Committee was established with a membership of the ten project directors (Ollie Fein represented Cleveland), the Executive Director of ERAP, Rennie Davis, and five members elected by SDS National Council, one of which was Sharon Jeffrey.⁴⁷

Title and Functionality

After the National Council Meeting the ERAP chapter in Cleveland was named the Cleveland Community Project (CCP) and it officially began organizing on Saturday, June 20, 1964. Nine staff members established their office and communal home at 2908 Jay Avenue and began planning for the future of their organization. The first reports that the CCP sent back to the ERAP office in Ann Arbor were full of exuberance and optimism. The staff was excited about the work they were doing and the organizational methods they planned to implement. However, they did stumble over a few problems in the beginning. They had to find a way to enter the community and learn how to communicate effectively with the people who resided in it, they had to find issues on which people wanted to organize, and they needed to secure funding for their program.⁴⁸

Initially, voter registration was chosen as the best way to introduce the CCP to the predominately White NWS, but the issue was soon dropped as door-to-door contacts confirmed that it was not an issue about which people in the area cared. Instead they found that there was a sense of “institutionalized poverty” within the housing projects. It was true that no one starved to death and most people had enough clothing, but there was a sense of a governmental “system of poverty” that the poor did not have the political power to fight the “community poverty” in which they lived. The CCP believed that the

⁴⁷ Ibid, 47-49, 54-55.

⁴⁸ Unknown, “Report from Cleveland Community Project”, (June 20-28, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

poor had some control and some power within their community if they recognized their ability to organize and change their economic environment. Some people they visited were willing to band together to fight against that system, but others were more pessimistic and found no reason to join the organization.⁴⁹

The most striking difference was between the Blacks and the Whites living in the local NWS. Most young Blacks had already given much thought to the causes of unemployment in the area and had begun to coordinate their efforts against the system. The Whites, on the other hand, felt there were not enough jobs but they did not think that organizing was the solution to their problems. Rather, the Whites expected the economy to get better, therefore entitling them to more jobs. The CCP planned on revisiting both groups of people in the following week to strengthen personal connections and to present more specific plans for organizing.⁵⁰

The internal functioning of the CCP was very informal and everyone shared responsibilities and authority. People were named “keepers” rather than “directors” to disperse responsibility and promote equality among the members. The budget for the CCP allotted each person \$3 per week for food. During the first week they averaged \$0.49 per person per day and claimed they had been fed “pretty well.” The group realized they needed more funds to become an effective organization and planned to reach out to other organizations in the area for help. They hoped to present speeches in the local churches for fundraising purposes and work for the Meatcutters Union as

⁴⁹ Ibid, 4-5.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 5-6.

envelope stuffers to provide income. They understood that they had to explore more options and intended to do so at a later date.⁵¹

One method they explored was to track down grants and other “non-traditional” funding sources. Kathy Boudin, a member of the CCP, applied for a grant through Rabinowitz and Boudin, Attorneys at Law and received a reply asking for clarification about ERAP’s affiliations and legislative agenda. The board rejected the first application but was willing to reconsider if they received more information regarding ERAP. The firm was located in New York, which showed the lengths CCP members were stretching to attain any type of monies.⁵² Jeffrey also wrote letters to secure funding. Her initial request was rejected by the Cleveland chapter of the UAW, but after she asked for a letter from Irving Bluestone, Walter Reuther’s administrative assistant, supporting ERAP, the local chapter was willing to help to the extent to which they were able.⁵³

National Penny-Pinching

Rennie Davis was also feeling the pinch of funds from the ERAP office in Ann Arbor. He had attended the March UAW convention and found a possible source of funding: the UAW backed Crusade Against Poverty. The Crusade Against Poverty was granted \$1.1 million to distribute among organizations that they deemed important. Davis was excited about the possibility of receiving some of that money, given SDS’s and ERAP’s close tie to the UAW, but he also saw the crusade as an ideological problem for SDS and mainly for ERAP. The UAW was funding a program that moved poor people into coalition with the old left and their ideas that legislation and politics were

⁵¹ Ibid, 6-7.

⁵² Unknown, Letter to Miss Kathy Boudin, (July 15, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 7.

⁵³ Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to Mr. Irving Bluestone, (June 23, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland, and Irv Bluestone, Letter to Pat O’Malley – Director of Region 2, (July 29, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

needed to change the conditions of the poor communities, rather than ERAP's stance that it was the organized poor, Whites and Blacks, that constituted a "critical new element" to the War on Poverty.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Davis sent out a mass mailing to entice contributions from anyone who had previously donated or those who deemed ERAP relevant to the movement against poverty. He described ERAP as "hopeful", "exciting", and "still an infant" but something that could "spark a dynamic force" against poverty. He estimated the 1964 summer budget to be \$20,000 for the national program and emphasized that much of the early support had come from the "nickel and dime contributions of hundreds of students." But he understood that the student fund had dried up during the summer months and it was vital that he find \$4,000 to keep many ERAP programs from going bankrupt. He knew that if ERAP failed, it would not be because of a lack of talent or energy, but rather a lack of funds to carry out the program.⁵⁵

The programs that especially needed monetary help were in Chicago, Baltimore, and Louisville. Davis wrote the Cleveland project to request financial contributions to those programs that were in dire economic need. He wanted Ollie Fein to send a total of \$100 to the struggling programs which ERAP would possibly pay back at a later date. There is no record of Fein making that contribution, but the letter of request shows Davis's knowledge of and the scope of ERAP's eventual financial failure.⁵⁶

By the end of July, Davis was looking to cut programs. There was a meeting planned for the ERAP Executive Committee in Philadelphia on August 8 and 9 and Davis wanted a report from all project directors to evaluate the likelihood of their projects

⁵⁴ Rennie Davis, "ERAP Project Report", (June 20 – July 1, 1964), 1-2, SDS-SB, reel 10, number 1.

⁵⁵ Rennie Davis, Letter to Friends, [Summer, 1964], SDS-2B, reel 11, number 14.

⁵⁶ Rennie Davis, Letter to Ollie, (July 23, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

surviving through the fall. He pointed out that the Cleveland program should bring attention to its work with the White community, since ERAP as a whole was focusing on those communities. Also, they needed to report on how they fit into a national program instead of focusing the entire report on their individual chapter. This was a key difference from the original idea that SDS fought against national bureaucracy and promoted the direct participation of people in their communities. It also contradicted Davis's earlier plan to base the direction of the national organization on input from local chapters. The last and most important factor was how they planned to fund their program beyond the summer months. Each of these points in Davis's letter uncovered a growing concern that ERAP was not going to survive in any area other than Newark, Boston, and Chicago. The smaller, more independent programs had to report on how they would conform to the national plans of ERAP or realize the possibility of being cut from the SDS organization.⁵⁷

The ERAP Executive Committee agenda focused on "organizational and ideological" problems. They questioned where ERAP belonged within SDS and the tensions between organizational roles and their responsibilities to a community. They also examined the role that ERAP played within Black communities and whether they were expected to become involved in any civil rights activity. They recognized the potential factionalism that was beginning to take shape within the individual projects and wanted to curtail it before it ruptured the organization. All these factors were problems that Davis and the ERAP Executive Committee wanted to avoid.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Rennie Davis, Letter to Ollie Fein, (July 20, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland, and SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

⁵⁸ ERAP Executive Committee, "Proposed Agenda", [August, 1964], SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

The Survival Report and a New Voice

The CCP responded with a report defending their position within the Cleveland community and outlining the potential programs they were developing. They stated that Cleveland was a medium to large city that was located in the “industrial belt” of the Mid-West. Its location gave ERAP and SDS a good measurement of political and economic movements throughout the Mid-West. The CCP was working with the principally White NWS, but it did not rule out the possibility of becoming a city-wide organization. The main reason for the expansion was the great potential they saw in a local group of welfare mothers identified as the Citizens United for Adequate Welfare (CUFAW). CUFAW was started by some ministers of the Inner-City Protestant Parish and worked with the Whites of the NWS and the Blacks of the East Side. For that reason, the CCP saw their organization expanding into the Black community to continue their work with CUFAW and promote a truly interracial movement.⁵⁹

The CCP did cite staffing problems as its main concern. There were no SDS chapters in Cleveland or the surrounding communities from which they could recruit directly. However, they did see potential in developing student activism on the campuses of Case Western Reserve, Cleveland Tech, Feen College, Community College, Baldwin Wallace College, and John Carroll University. They also stressed the continuous income sources they had found: blood bank work, research work at local colleges and

⁵⁹ Cleveland Community Project, “Cleveland: Continuation of Projects”, [Summer, 1964], SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

universities, and picketing assistance for the Meatcutters' Union. They felt that all these factors combined to make a case for their continuation in ERAP.⁶⁰

CUFAW

The CCP's report was approved by Davis and the ERAP Executive Committee to remain active in Cleveland and receive financial backing from the ERAP national program. The approval meant that the CCP was able to continue their work with CUFAW and build their bond with the people who lived in the NWS. Their research confirmed that welfare was a hard subject on which to organize a community. Many people felt ashamed of their economic dependency on Welfare and their inability to cut their dependence from the program. Children were treated differently in schools because of their economic dependency on welfare and neighbors frowned upon those who accepted the "hand-out" of the government. Nanci Hollander, a member of CCP and CUFAW, wrote, "Any possible spirit of cooperation is lost in this environment and each turns inward to be concerned with his own problems, his own life."⁶¹ Sharon Jeffrey obtained a song written by a woman on welfare which emphasized the need for welfare expansion. It contained references to the restrictions placed on the checks she received, the unreasonable ratios of food and clothing they were to cover, and the possibility of losing an entire generation to poverty.⁶²

The CCP believed welfare could become their main issue on which to organize and saw many positive reasons why they should take it up as a community issue: they expected to organize against a system that reduced people to dependency and isolation; CUFAW was already established and had a local membership; and they held some

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nanci Hollander, "Cleveland", [June 1964], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 95.

⁶² Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to Clark Kissinger, (July 24, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

uneffective demonstrations for increased income possibilities. The main problem was how the CCP was going to translate a welfare neighborhood with a very small community voice into a minority that achieved a politically significant voice. If the CCP successfully organized enough people dependent on welfare and gave them a political voice, they felt the next logical step was eventual transformation of the poor community into an active participant with political substance.⁶³

The first co-sponsored meeting of the CCP and CUFAW convened on July 27, 1964. The week prior had been spent recruiting mothers on welfare and talking to the leaders of CUFAW to understand the possibilities of program expansion. The CCP wanted to organize on four main points: a possible September demonstration for clothing demands; money for school supplies; welfare check-cashing flexibility; and a sliding scale for food stamps. The CCP made contacts in the Cleveland welfare department who were sympathetic to their goals and researched data to deduce from where welfare money was coming and who was spending the money within welfare families. The CCP wanted to create a learning environment to help get people off of welfare assistance and into paying jobs without fracturing the fragile psychological dependency that existed in the community.⁶⁴

At the beginning of August, three CCP staff members went to the ERAP Executive Committee meeting in Philadelphia and the rest of the CCP staff organized a second meeting of welfare mothers, this one led only by CCP members. They reported that this meeting was more productive than the first meeting, but still not to the standard of which the CCP felt comfortable. The CCP members suggested a public stealing

⁶³ Cleveland Community Project, "Cleveland Report", (July 23, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

⁶⁴ Cleveland Community Project, "Cleveland", (July 27, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

campaign where the welfare mothers publicly stole clothes they needed for the children to go to school. Many of the mothers thought it was a good idea, but after the meeting they seemed confused about the idea of publicly stealing to dramatize the issue verses secretly stealing to get their children clothes they could keep.⁶⁵

The frustration level of CCP members who attended the meeting was high. They expected challenges, but they still did not relate well to the people they were to be organizing. Their aggravation mounted when their meetings were unorganized and sporadic in nature. That week they debated a question that later tore ERAP apart: what leadership role was appropriate for a member of ERAP to take? The idea of organizing the people around the issues that affected them most still rang true for the CCP members, but now they wondered how their interjections into meetings distorted the outcome. Some felt that CCP members were obligated to lead the meetings and keep the participants on track, as well as educate them on the possible solutions to their problems. Others thought that they needed to influence people before the meeting and help them organize their thoughts before the meeting took place. That allowed the people in the community to run their own meeting, thus initiating their own solutions to their problems.⁶⁶

More Financial Problems: National and Local

These concerns over leadership had not yet been raised at the national level. The ERAP Executive Committee had enough logistical and monetary problems without having to worry about ideological ones. A major staffing shortage of full time organizers was on the horizon and the committee recognized the problems it was going to produce.

⁶⁵ Cleveland Community Project, "Cleveland", (August 10, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

It was not only full time members they were losing, but also the students, who were leaving the communities and returning to school, creating disillusionment in the communities they were leaving. Staffing problems were also the reason ERAP had not developed a campus recruitment program; ERAP still depended on SDS as a parent organization to send student volunteers to the local chapters. The committee proposed a relocation of some staff members from projects that had adequate staff to understaffed projects like Cleveland.⁶⁷

The ERAP Executive Committee questioned the ability to expand their programs into other cities if they could not financially support the existing ones. It was thought that the program was only able to expand into cities where SDS intended to expand already, thus sharing the operational costs. The financial situation was grave at best. The ERAP national office reported an income of \$1,177.91 and expenses totaling \$2,101.02 for the month of July, 1964. That reduced the bank balance of their national program to a total of \$65.10. The ERAP Executive Committee decided that individual projects had to be financially independent from September 1 through at least the middle of October to allow the national ERAP coffers to be replenished.⁶⁸

Even though CCP members had been living on a daily food budget of \$0.388 per person, the next month they scraped for money for other ERAP organizations.⁶⁹ Davis sent out a plea for help to every ERAP program. He stated that September and October were tough months for the financial stability of ERAP because many foundations, unions, and church groups did not consider grant applicants until October or even November. By

⁶⁷ ERAP Executive Committee, "Notes for the NC Committee on ERAP", [August, 1964], SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid, and Clark Kissinger, "The Voice of the National Office" *SDS Worklist Mailing*, vol. 1, no. 4, SDS-2B, reel 10, number 1.

⁶⁹ Cleveland Community Project, Cleveland, July 27, 1964.

mid-September Davis claimed to have \$1,000 for the national program, but he needed another \$4,000 to secure all programs for the fall. He realized the dilemma they faced. He stated, “You [ERAP members] are the last one in the world who should be asked to dip into your pockets in the coming month for ERAP.”⁷⁰

At the same time, Carol McEldowney had taken over the financial records for the CCP. She sent a financial letter to Davis stating that the bank statement she included was deceptive. The statement listed their account as having a balance of \$330.48; however, that amount included a deposit of \$360 that Charlotte Fein had loaned to the CCP, but needed back in order to pay her tuition. According to the account records, CCP members had sent \$740 of pledge money to the national ERAP office, which gave McEldowney a position to request \$100 to keep the CCP out of a deficit.⁷¹ As McEldowney earnestly attempted to secure funds from Davis, Jeffrey obtained medical care for all the CCP members through what she called, “a union commy health program.” The health plan was sponsored by a local union that had promised to give donations to the project as well.⁷²

Personal donations were also sought to pad the CCP treasury. In a letter to Don Michael of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., the CCP asked for a personal pledge to pull the project out of debt. They also asked that Michael provide them any personal contacts he had in the area so they could talk to them about possible donations. They estimated the monthly budget for the seven person staff in Cleveland was going to be \$650, and they did not have that amount in their account.⁷³ Not only did

⁷⁰ Rennie Davis, Letter to Veterans of ERAP Wars, (September 12, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

⁷¹ Carol McEldowney, Letter to Rennie Davis, (September 15, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁷² Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to Rennie Davis, (September 16, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁷³ Unknown, Letter to Mr. Don Michael, (September 20, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 14.

they depend on personal donations and contacts, but they also pursued part-time employment to keep the CCP out of the red. McEldowney talked to the same union that had offered the CCP a health plan and they agreed to employ some of the members answering phones from midnight to 7:00 AM. Aside from money, one positive aspect of the job was that the phones hardly ever rang during those hours, so the CCP members were able to work on studying, writing, or producing leaflets during that time and still get paid \$1.50 per hour.⁷⁴

In the report that the CCP submitted to the NO concerning the week of September 20 – 27, finances dominated the text. The major complaint of the members was that all their time was spent fundraising and little time was spent organizing. Instead of meeting with community members on issues regarding public housing and unemployment, CCP members were canvassing the NWS trying to convince people to contribute monthly pledges. During that weekend, the members had to attend a fundraising barbecue in place of a discussion about the poverty that plagued their communities. However, not all was gloomy for the CCP; their report concluded on a positive note, “‘Part of the way with LBJ’ buttons are selling like Beatle pictures!”⁷⁵

While the CCP was barely surviving the economic hardships of ERAP, Davis was touting the successes of ERAP to the SDS National Council and the Executive Committee of the LID. To the LID committee, SDS reported that three ERAP programs had to be discontinued, not because of funding issues, but because they lacked the staff interest to continue. Only those three out of ten ERAP programs had failed, which

⁷⁴ Carol McEldowney, Letter to Rennie Davis, (September 21, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁷⁵ Cleveland Community Project, “Cleveland”, (September 20 – 27, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

presented LID with a 70% success rate for Davis and his program.⁷⁶ Previously, Davis had prepared a report to the SDS National Council on which the LID presentation was based. There were no proposals to cut back funding to ERAP programs or mention of the hardships many individual projects faced. Instead, Davis reported:

We are *not* in a period in which we must conserve the thin resources that we have. Instead we should expect to develop new areas of support and opportunities for expansion. We should have every intention of raising \$100,000 for the program [ERAP] this year; we should give serious attention to expanding the number of community projects. This statement favors the position that SDS should take every advantage of the opportunities before it. It requests acceptance not only of a program as broad as the one sketched here, but commitment to the spirit of expansion and growth behind it.

The hope in his report resembles the excitement and exuberance he felt after taking over for Haber nearly nine months prior. He was selling his program to the members of the SDS National Council to get them to recognize it in front of LID. Davis thought that exposure to LID might increase their allocation of funds to ERAP, but there is no evidence that it did.⁷⁷

As Davis was spouting his position to SDS and LID leaders, the CCP started its own marketing device in October, a community newsletter. The first issue gave a brief synopsis of SDS, ERAP, and the focus of the CCP. It then turned to the three major programs that the CCP was working on: welfare, public housing, and unemployment. The financially unstable CCP included a form for subscribers to donate money and thanked *The Outpost* and community churches for donating money and supplies to create the newsletter.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Students for a Democratic Society, "Review of SDS Activity for Summer of 1964", (September 17, 1964), SDS Records micro-film, series 2A, reel 3, number 18.

⁷⁷ Rennie Davis, "ERAP Fall Program: Report to the National Council", [September, 1964], SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

⁷⁸ *Cleveland Community Project Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 1, (October, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 95.

Foundations of a Political Voice

The next month was exciting for the CCP and CUFAW as they attempted to organize the East and West Sides into one community. Some of the women decided to form a chapter of CUFAW on the East side of Cleveland to make it more accessible for Blacks who wanted a voice in the organization, which was the first incursion into the East Side made by the CCP. They began discussing the possibility of building a community union for people to express their problems freely in a public setting. They also faced a staffing problem: there were too many people who wanted to volunteer for part-time positions and the CCP did not have programs in which they could work. They developed surveys and door-to-door canvassing to facilitate the volunteers that only worked weekends. They also denounced the Council for Economic Improvement in Greater Cleveland as a fraudulent council used to scam money from the federal “War on Poverty” programs. Ken McEldowney wrote of the council’s Poverty Board, “their proposal does not really recognize poverty as a social problem. On the contrary, it leaves the impression that poverty is simply a collection of personal problems.”⁷⁹

The Welfare Mothers Speak

In December of 1964, a CUFAW member by the name of Phyllis Jackson wrote the *Cleveland Press* in response to an editorial run by L.B. Seltzer that claimed, “The impoverished could hardly care less.” Her letter was a powerful statement that portrayed the mothers on welfare not as a group that did not care, but rather a group that had no voice to change their circumstances. She blamed the local Poverty Board for not complying with President Johnson’s plan to give a voice to the poor and to allow them to

⁷⁹ Cleveland Community Project, “Cleveland Report”, (November 19, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24, and Ken McEldowney, “Critique of Cleveland Poverty Proposal”, *Cleveland Community Project*, vol. 1, no. 2, (November, 1964), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 95.

make decisions for their welfare. She wrote about the hardships not only of raising her children on \$159 a month, but also how she struggled with a philosophy she had grown up with:

Try teaching your children a philosophy to sustain their adulthood, as I am trying to teach mine, when that philosophy has blown up in your face as it has mine. That philosophy which says, “all men are brothers; they do care! Opportunity will always come to improve our situation.”

She suggested that they replace half of the members of the board with poor urbanites. She did not disagree with the number of people on the board, but she did disagree with the composition of the members. She compared the board members to “feudal lords [of] the Middle Ages” and insisted they “prefer to label us poor, as bumbling idiots at best, as pinkish dissenters at worst, rather than face the facts.” Her letter was copied and sent to President Johnson, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *The Call and Post*, and *The Washington Post*. She wanted her voice to be heard and the CCP led CUAFW gave her the opportunity to express that voice.⁸⁰

January 18, 1965 found over fifty people, thirty-five of them welfare mothers, protesting seventeen blocks away from the County Commissioners Office. The rally was led by the newest CCP member and lifelong resident of the NWS, Lillian Craig. Craig was a welfare mother who was concerned over the direction in which her life and her community were headed. The rally was sponsored by the CCP and CUFAW to bring attention to the needs of welfare children. In Cleveland, the county and federal welfare grants were at 70% of the state’s minimum standard. Children from welfare families were expected to pay \$0.15 a day for school lunch. Craig insisted that after her welfare

⁸⁰ Phyllis Jackson, “Open Letter to L.B. Seltzer, Editor, Cleveland Press, Cleveland, Ohio”, (December 17, 1964), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

check was used on essential items, there was hardly anything left for the clothing and school supplies it was also supposed to cover.⁸¹

The rally moved to the Administration Building where the participants were seated in the chambers where county officials were meeting to discuss the allocation of welfare funds. One after another, the mothers stood and explained that they did not need an incredible amount of money; they just wanted the federal money to go towards providing free school lunches for their children. Their pleas were heard and the demonstration was successful; the commissioners sent a telegram to the school board requesting a meeting to discuss what they needed to do to go to the state capitol and get more funding for free school lunches. It was a small victory, but one that was important to the members of the poor community.⁸²

At the end of February, the CCP turned over their newsletter to the poor people of the community. They felt that it was time for the poor to start leading the discussions and report what they felt was important in the community. The CCP still assisted with the distribution and some of the publication, but the newsletter had essentially become the voice of the community. The struggle of welfare mothers and CUFAW was still a key issue to the NWS and a couple of mothers wrote articles in the newsletter expressing their displeasure with the welfare system. It had been a month since their rally at the County Commissioner's Offices and there had been no substantial change in the school lunch program. What they thought was a victory was becoming a stalemate that the welfare mothers knew they would lose.

⁸¹ Lillian Craig, "The Power of a Few", *Cleveland Community Project Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 1, (February, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 95, and Lillian Craig, "The Power of a Few", Report from Cleveland, [January, 1965], SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

⁸² Ibid.

Two welfare mothers presented their monthly budget in the community newsletter. Both of them had just over \$120 in welfare checks to use for the entire month. After rent, gas, electricity, and food for the household, one mother was left with \$11 and the other had \$27. With their leftover money they were expected to buy bathroom supplies, cleaning products, clothing, coffee, school supplies, and school lunches. One mother stated that the commissioners and the school board were working against them by accusing welfare mothers of being incompetent, illiterate, negligent, and immoral. Dorothy Hammer, a member of CUFAW, was outraged at the school board and specifically board member McAllister for comments he made in a local newspaper regarding the irresponsibility of welfare mothers. In response to that statement, Hammer exclaimed, "As for our children eating detergents, let's not be dreamers. We can't even afford detergents to clean with, let alone feed our children." Another report was more heart wrenching, "At times you lose your identity and feeling of worthiness as a human being. There is a feeling of depression and defeat in most of these families because in most cases they know there is no way out." These feelings of depression and defeat were the obstacles the CCP originally worried about in Cleveland, but after less than a year in the community, they had encouraged those people to express their feelings in a productive way that had a chance to change their economic and political situation.⁸³

"Great hope and great faith and mainly determination"

The students involved with the poor welfare mothers and others in economically downtrodden communities were being compared by student newspapers to the Narodniks in 1874 Russia who went to the peasants to advocate populism and ultimately failed.

⁸³ Dorothy Hammer, Letter to Mr. McAllister, (February 18, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24, Dorothy Hammer, "My Personal View", [February, 1965], SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24, and Unsigned, "Statement of a Public Assistance Mother: Cleveland, Ohio", [February, 1965], SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

However, the CCP was determined not to concede under the pressure of commissioners or school boards as the Narodniks had conceded to the Russian government. Their political power was weak, but they still believed in the principle of the poor leading their own movement. To emphasize their commitment, the CCP organized a Community People's Conference in Cleveland for February 19-21, 1965. The conference was to be attended by only those involved in SDS or ERAP, as well as those living in the poor circumstances the conference wished to address. Members of the poor Cleveland community did not want professionals coming to the conference just to speak to them and then leave. It was important to them that the people speaking to them were people in the same situation or people who were directly working with them to change their problems.⁸⁴

The welcome statement was given by Gloria Ransom and it stressed the importance of the conference. The absence of governmental structure and professional observance within the conference gave the participants freedom to express their ideas and propose new solutions to poverty. They were not there to mourn their poverty status, but to "break the barriers of this uninvited poverty." The conference was to address the need to fight against not just poverty, but the causes of poverty. She proclaimed, "We are assembled here not altogether as poverty-stricken individuals, but as men and women of great hope and great faith and mainly determination."⁸⁵

The meetings were held at two local churches that had donated their facilities for the conference's use, St. Paul's Church and Fidelity Baptist Church. The papers

⁸⁴ Cleveland Community Project, "Cleveland Community People's Conference", *ERAP Newsletter*, (February 19, 1965), SDS-2B, number 24.

⁸⁵ Gloria Ransom, "Welcoming Statement", *Cleveland Community People's Conference*, (Winter, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 92.

prepared for the conference came from Cleveland, Chicago, Chester, PA, Mississippi, and others and then were distributed to those attending. SNCC even submitted a paper proving they still supported the work ERAP was doing in poor Black neighborhoods in the North while they were fighting for civil rights in the South. The conference agenda consisted mostly of small discussion groups that focused on specific poverty issues and how to solve them. Some groups were used as sounding boards for people to understand what was going on in other ERAP communities throughout the country, and to show them that they were not alone in their struggle.⁸⁶

Early on, there was uneasiness in ERAP concerning the poor running a community conference in Cleveland. Though poor community members were completely responsible for planning the discussions and the agenda, CCP members quietly worried about their ability to disperse the funds of a national organization and their wherewithal to create papers for distribution. It was decided that ERAP members would be responsible for the money distribution since they had obtained the funds, but it would be subject to the vote of the community members involved in the conference. As always, the budget would be tight and Davis would be in charge of financing.⁸⁷

Financing the Community People's Conference

In January, Tom Kahn, the Executive Secretary of LID, sent a letter to David Hunter thanking him for a contribution of \$4,849 for the Cleveland Community Leaders' Conference. He assured Mr. Hunter that the conference was "to be held under the sponsorship of the LID and Students for a Democratic Society." There was no mention of ERAP, Rennie Davis, or the poor who were to organize it. The dollar amount can be

⁸⁶ Cleveland Community Project, "Agenda for Cleveland Community People's Conference", *Cleveland Community People's Conference*, (Winter, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 92.

⁸⁷ Carol McEldowney, "Article on Conference", *Bulletin*, (February 7, 1965), SDS-2B reel 15, number 93.

traced to a memo written by Davis that suggested the total budget for the conference would be \$4,979. Hunter fell just \$130 short of funding the conference alone with the grant he offered.⁸⁸

ERAP also received \$500 from the Associate Director of the United Presbyterian Church to be used towards the Cleveland Conference of Community Leaders. However, when the CCP responded to questions from members of the Pittsburgh Presbytery that were planning to come to the conference, they stated that the Presbyterian members “will not incur any expenses while in Cleveland.” The CCP let them know that their food and transportation was covered by the \$500 grant from the Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race. Therefore, none of the grant was used for conference costs; instead it was used only to bring outside ministers into Cleveland to attend.⁸⁹

Once the ERAP conference money made it to Cleveland, the CCP was confused about how the national office wanted it dispersed. In February 1965, the CCP still did not have an operating budget from Davis or ERAP. What they did have was \$800 that was earmarked for the conference but no guidance as to how to use it. The ERAP national office responded by stating that the CCP was responsible for allocating money for conference expenses and that “The \$800 Rennie sent you is supposed to cover all the conference expenses and the remainder to be used by the project for organizing.” One wonders what happened to the \$4,979 budget Davis had compiled to gather grant money from Mr. Hunter in January and the \$4, 849 that Mr. Hunter sent LID. There is no evidence that the money was ever used for the conference, or for the CCP. It is more

⁸⁸ Tom Kahn, Letter to Mr. David R. Hunter, (January 20, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 97, and Rennie Davis, “Budget for the Cleveland Community People’s Conference”, [Unknown], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 97.

⁸⁹ J. Metz Rollins, Jr., Letter to Mr. Rennie Davis, (January 15, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 15, number 97, and Carol McEldowney, Letter to Mrs. M. Hofer, (February 16, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91.

likely that the ERAP national office kept the money and used it to fund other programs that were drowning in financial despair.⁹⁰

Just as there was misinformation about money contributed to the ERAP national office, the CCP had to mislead the community members with regards to their own budget. At a conference committee meeting, the members had to vote on what amount of money ERAP organizations would be granted for travel expenses. One such organization was flying from San Francisco and had requested funds to cover their trek. Under the influence of CCP members present, the committee voted against giving money to the California ERAP members. The committee did approve less expensive travel for members from Boston and Carbondale in southern Illinois. In a letter explaining their position, the CCP admitted to the San Francisco chapter their dishonesty:

To a large extent SDS has been responsible for controlling the purse strings. This has led to an unhappy situation in which we've had to be dishonest in describing the financing of the conference to the community people; they do not know the extent of the money we've raised. Therefore, it's not surprising that people here voted not to send the money to California.

They believed that Davis was using the remainder of the money for project expansion and meeting current projects' expenses. The amount of secrecy and deceit needed to finance ERAP was flowing down from the top.⁹¹

Cleveland's National Success

Despite the bare financial coffers of ERAP, the Cleveland conference proved to be a success. It marked the high point of ERAP organizing in Cleveland both in terms of

⁹⁰ Carol McEldowney, Letter to ERAP, Tina Schranger, and Dave Bernstein, (February 2, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91, and Dave Bernstein, Letter to Carol McEldowney, (February 5, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91.

⁹¹ Lillian Craig, "Conference Committee Minutes", (February 5, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91, Carol McEldowney, Letters to Larry Caughron and John Mendeloff, (February 14, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91, and Carol McEldowney, Letter to Mike Miller, (February 9, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91.

ideological goals and action oriented goals. People who attended the conference walked away with a new sense of what organizing the poor entailed and the possibilities that surrounded the future of ERAP. Besides the secretive financial dealings, the poor community had complete control of the conference and received their first true sense of empowerment.

The reactions of people from Newark, Boston, Chicago, and locals from Cleveland reported to ERAP were astounding. One respondent said, "Cleveland was different- it made me feel like I didn't have to be scared or nothing. I could say anything I wanted." Another said, "The most wonderful thing about the conference was that the poor whites and the poor Negroes were working together to fight for a better life." And yet another exclaimed, "This conference was not a conference of Negroes and whites, but truly a conference of community people. By accepting all the participants of the Conference for themselves, we could then focus on the basic problems we all face, Poverty!"⁹²

Obviously, it was the combination of poor Blacks and poor Whites working together that provided the appeal of the conference. The Whites and the Blacks at the conference worked together against the central issue of poverty and were fighting to better their lives. They communicated and reasoned with each other to unite as a common voice against poverty. It was not only the poor that were affected by the conference. The organizers in the CCP were still "tingling" weeks after the conference. They reported about one hundred and twenty-five people came to Cleveland for discussion about what needed to be done to improve the well-being of poor individuals

⁹² Newark, Boston, and Cleveland Participants, "Conference Reactions", [1965], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 92.

and families. They claimed that some people not involved in the conference may have thought it was a civil rights group marching in the streets and singing freedom songs, but they were mistaken because their freedom songs “meant freedom from poverty.”⁹³

Beginnings of the End

Soon after the conference, the emotions, time, and effort of the CCP had to be spent on recruiting summer help from the college campuses. Though there had been discussion about the best ways to integrate the three month workers, it was widely accepted that any help was good help for a struggling organization like ERAP. To Carol McEldowney there was a fundamental problem with ERAP recruitment; it was based on a “survival of the fittest” mentality. That meant if any project was understaffed to begin with then it was unlikely that they would have extra time to spend for recruitment. She intended to implement a culture of non-competitive staff recruitment, claiming its purpose was to cut back on the recruitment for individual projects and funnel all applicants into a common pool of resources.⁹⁴

Non-Competitive Recruitment

The staff applications, she proposed, were to be funneled through the ERAP national office and then distributed to the projects they fit the best. It would still be the job of individual projects to recruit, but after they received the applications they had to find the right program for the individual based on the needs of ERAP. An unintended byproduct of her proposal was the increased communication between ERAP groups. An earlier lack of communication had been a source of discontent between some of the

⁹³ Gloria Ransom, “The Poor People’s Conference”, [1965], SDS-2B, reel 15, number 92, Carol McEldowney, Letter to Richie Rothstein, (February 26, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 91, and “Conference Reactions”, *ERAP Newsletter*, (March 4, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

⁹⁴ Carol McEldowney, Letter to ERAP Staff and Friends, (April 15, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 2.

projects; now they had to communicate with each other and thus they better realized the problems and shortcomings that ERAP faced as a whole organization.⁹⁵

The key to non-competitive recruitment was the cooperation of all ERAP organizations. Part of the process was informing all the projects what each individual project's needs were at that time. The CCP felt it was time to expand their programs to the East Side of Cleveland and required more full-time organizers to do so. Sharon Jeffrey wrote the Chicago project to inform them of Cleveland's possible expansion which would require more people to implement that change. However, as the summer recruitment period continued, not every program complied with the non-competitive pact. Jeffrey wrote a scathing note to the Boston project criticizing their lack of concern for other projects. She claimed that the Cleveland project only had four people committed to Cleveland for the summer and none of them were going to stay longer. They did have five, but they sent one recruit to Boston to see how ERAP was run there and they later received a letter from the applicant stating that he had decided to stay in Boston. She wrote, "Now normally this would not have been a problem, but his letter to us also indicated that the Boston project had 30 applicants. Even if only half that many come you will still have three times more than what we have." She ended the letter by asking for their comments and not wishing any hard feelings between the projects. She signed the letter, "Pax, Sharon."⁹⁶

In their letter to possible applicants, the CCP described their history in the Cleveland area. They explained how they were continuing their work with CUFAW and how they had recently won their battle for free school lunches with the Cuyahoga County

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to Chicago ERAP, (May 6, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland, and Sharon Jeffrey, Letter to John Mendeloff and Boston Project, (May 13, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

Commissioners and the Cleveland Board of Education. They also listed new decisions that were going to be made over the summer, one such choice was the way they were going to be housed. At that time they were living communally and they questioned if that type of lifestyle separated them on principle from the family oriented community. However, they felt that cooperative living was essential to group learning and growth as opposed to living in homes throughout the community. Just as Ollie Fein had requested in his letter a year earlier, the CCP asked that the applicants bring an increased amount of \$200 with them to cover their expenses. But they stressed that it should not hinder their decision to participate in the Cleveland project and that longevity was the most important quality they could bring with them.⁹⁷

Community Spirit Experiment

Expansion into the East Side of Cleveland was a major selling point for new applicants. But the next most popular selling point was the possibility that the scope of the NWS was to expand to include “community spirit” and employ the services of Robert (Bob) Smiddie and his family, wife Connie and their two kids, to initiate a theater. The Smiddies were from Nashville Tennessee, and Bob was growing tired of welfare work in that community. The son of a poor coal miner, Bob graduated from Middle Tennessee State and had been trained to be a playwright. His poor economic status was different from the middle-class college recruits that SDS and ERAP usually attracted. He had contacted SDS because he was attracted to the radical ideas of the organization. SDS and ERAP saw the potential for a community spirit program in either their Chicago or

⁹⁷ Cleveland Project Staff, Letter to Applicant, (April 23, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

Cleveland Projects and left it to Smiddie to decide where he wanted to move his family. He chose Cleveland.⁹⁸

That summer, excitement gripped the CCP. Carol McEldowney wrote to the Chicago office asking them for moral support and financial understanding because the theater project was experimental to ERAP. The CCP understood the theater was a national experiment and warned that they might have to borrow money from the already broke ERAP national office, but only if it was necessary. They believed they could finance the theater for \$5,000 in the first year, but money was always going to be a problem. The Smiddies submitted a proposal for how much they were going to need for their June move from Nashville to Cleveland and the CCP countered it with a proposal of their own. They decided to drive to Nashville and move the Smiddies themselves to save money rather than pay for a crew to move them to Cleveland.⁹⁹

With the Smiddies on their way and a new community theater in the works, the CCP received two letters specifically interested in Cleveland because of the theatrical possibilities. Both applicants expressed interest in the idea of a community spirit program rather than political organizing on the East Side. The overall amount of staff applications had increased and the non-competitive recruiting seemed to be working by the beginning of June.¹⁰⁰ In some instances, the CCP even had to turn away interested candidates. Such was the case of Judy Ball. Ball was a student at the University of Chicago and a member of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council based out of

⁹⁸ Cleveland Community Project, Letter to Connie, Bob and Kids, (March 31, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

⁹⁹ Carol McEldowney, Letter to ERAP Chicago Office, (May 13, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 8, and Carol McEldowney, Letter to Bob and Connie Smiddie, (May 23, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

¹⁰⁰ Carol McEldowney, Letter to ERAP Office and Chicago JOIN, (May 28, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 5, Ray [Unknown], Letter to Charlotte Fein, [1965], SDS-2B, Cleveland, and Chris Overs, Letter to Donald Lewis, (June 5, 1965), SDS-2B, Cleveland.

New York City. The director of the program wrote to the CCP to inform them that Ball was to intern with them and required living accommodations for the summer. The CCP politely declined the offer and wrote to Ball saying, “The local poor people feel very sensitive to people who live in a more prosperous area coming to ‘help’ them. So unless you can feel some type of commitment of living in the area of which you will be working, we feel we cannot accept your application.” Lillian Craig wrote the note to ensure Ball understood that it was a local poor person on the CCP staff that expressed those feelings.¹⁰¹

Anti-Poverty to Anti-War

Despite the small battles won on the local level in Cleveland, developments in the national ERAP office would prove troubling. During that time, ERAP as a national organization was being dissolved. The purpose was to minimize bureaucracy and allow each project to make decisions that best suited their communities. The absence of a national office to carry the burden of everyday paperwork and national newsletters made life tougher for the small projects such as Cleveland. The national decisions were now made by the NO in New York, whose time was occupied by the growing student movement against the Vietnam War.¹⁰²

The NO was increasingly concerned with fundraising for the student movement that was brewing. The SDS National Secretary, Clark Kissinger, sent a letter to all ERAP members (the name stuck even though the organization did not) regarding future fundraising possibilities for the projects even though the program on a national level had been terminated. The letter asked each project to send any donor information to the NO

¹⁰¹ Steven Antler, Letter to Cleveland Community Project, [June, 1965], SDS-2B, reel 14, number 90, and Lillian Craig, Letter to Judy Ball, (June 4, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 14, number 90.

¹⁰² Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 156.

so they could compile a national fundraising catalogue in a central location. He asked for specifics including who contributed to the March on Washington in their areas and how much each person or company contributed. He also stated the wish to create a “legal defense arm of the organization.” It was obvious that the radical student activists on campus were going to make better use of the legal assistance rather than the small community projects and the NO was setting up a support system that was to leave the ERAP projects behind.¹⁰³

As SDS moved away from an “interracial movement of the poor” and more towards an anti-war position, they lost much of the support they had gained from the UAW and other such donors. In 1969 the United States Senate launched an investigation into the inner workings of SDS and their involvement with campus and city unrest. Through their investigation, the Senate uncovered that the UAW had provided SDS with money for ERAP and called their spokesman, Joseph Walsh, in to testify. He acknowledged that the UAW had helped launch the program, but prefaced it by stating that the program was only intended to educate “ghetto children.” Walsh finished by stating that SDS had, “gone off on wild tangents” and because of those actions, the UAW had given no further aid to the organization.¹⁰⁴

A Resurgence of Community Apathy

During the month of July, with no national office to lead or fund their project, the CCP expanded into the East Side of Cleveland and Bob Smiddie held his first meeting of the community theater. The East Side expansion was like starting from scratch for the organizers who had previously helped the NWS. Once again they were faced with the

¹⁰³ Clark Kissinger, Memo to all ERAP Projects, (July 17, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 10, number 6.

¹⁰⁴ Eric Wentworth, *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, “Senate Panelists Told About SDS,” (June 17, 1969), A12.

dilemma of helping a community that was depressed and ashamed, and the organizers, including Ollie Fein, were even more frustrated because they had no clear direction without being able to talk to the community. Smiddie had a similar encounter with the theater project. Originally, he and community people had written a script designed for a eight person cast, but because of the lack of performing interest in the area, the group had to start on a new play involving only two characters. Even CUFAW was suffering from a lack of interest and a lack of people willing to work.¹⁰⁵

Smiddie eventually recruited enough people to perform their first one act play about a social worker and a poverty boy. He still needed more people to enact a complete skit for the community and he believed the community theater could become a place for people to relax and laugh at the exploitative landlords and politicians he planned to characterize on stage. He advertised for stage hands, musicians, and performers. More than anything, he wanted people who desired a voice. He said, “We would like to show the world that we are not a lot of ignorant poor people who don’t know the score. We believe that Theater is one way we can show everybody that we understand WHY we are getting a raw deal and that we intend to do something about it!”¹⁰⁶

Yet, while the spirit was still in the CCP to give the poor a voice, it was quickly draining from SDS. Instead of sending speakers about welfare and jobs programs, SDS began sending people to poor communities to talk about the Vietnam War. What they found, not surprisingly, was that people in poverty had too much to worry about on a day-to-day basis to be concerned about Americans and Viet Cong dying in Indochina. Nancy

¹⁰⁵ Cleveland Community Project, “Report from Cleveland”, *ERAP Newsletter*, (July 17, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24, and Cleveland Community Project, “Cleveland East Report”, *ERAP Newsletter*, (July 23, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

¹⁰⁶ Bob Smiddie, “Cleveland West Plans a Play”, *ERAP Newsletter*, (August 27, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24.

Gitlin, Todd Gitlin's wife, went to Cleveland for two days to talk to local groups about her experience and travels in Vietnam. One such group was CUFAW. SDS had expected to hold debates and informative sessions about the politics of the war and the impact on American lives, but many members of CUFAW had to first learn where Vietnam was and why there were North and South sections. Generally, very few people understood anything about the war.¹⁰⁷

SDS was changing in ideals and personnel. Many of the original members were out of graduate school and had very little time to consult the new, young leaders of SDS. The NO moved to Chicago and the actions of SDS also moved from poor community projects to free speech and anti-war protests, student strikes, and eventually violence. The ERAP programs continued past the summer of 1965 as a shell of the original projects, and by 1967 they had completely crumbled. Many urban poor communities felt betrayed by the people that had come to their neighborhood to help and then given up the fight. Lillian Craig said she "resented their mobility." Ollie and Charlotte stayed in the community organizing a group named Radicals in the Professions. Sharon Jeffrey left to organize in Chicago, Kathy Boudin later joined the radical Weathermen, and Carol McEldowney went east to join the women's liberation movement. Craig stayed in Cleveland and continued her social activism.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Because of the limitation of sources, what happened to the CCP beyond the summer of 1965 is speculation. What the members of the CCP did accomplish in Cleveland for those two years was a successful experiment of participatory democracy.

¹⁰⁷ Sharon Jeffrey, "Vietnam in Poor Black and White Communities", *ERAP Newsletter*, (August 14, 1965), SDS-2B, reel 11, number 24

¹⁰⁸ Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor*, 147-148.

They lived communally and gave the poor people of Cleveland's NWS a voice in their community without the CCP controlling their actions. Even though the ERAP national office was in financial and ideological trouble, the CCP organized an interracial ERAP conference using only the participation of local, poor community members. That conference was the first true realization of participatory democracy and an interracial movement of the poor. They worked with the CUFAW to defend local free school lunch programs and reshaped the way that the poor populace acted within their welfare situations. They orchestrated buy-ins throughout the NWS, charging clothes to the Cuyahoga County Welfare Department and gained media attention. The initial demonstrations did not see positive results immediately, but a year later proceeds from Mayor Carl Stokes inaugural ball went towards clothing for welfare children.¹⁰⁹

In a sense, the CCP accomplished in those two years what SDS as a whole had wanted to accomplish nationwide. They formed a communal living situation, injected themselves and were accepted into the neighborhood as colleagues against poverty, and organized as equal partners in the poor community. Hayden and Wittman wrote of an interracial movement of the poor and as ERAP was dismantled, the CCP was expanding from the White NWS into the Black East Side community of Cleveland to form one cohesive movement. The CPP survived despite the plight that the ERAP national office suffered and the financial struggles that plagued all the projects. They survived and carried the ideas of SDS past just words and into direct action.

In 1963, Dick Flacks wrote a paper for the SDS National Convention entitled, "America and the New Era" and it became the theoretical and ideological base for SDS for years to come. In it Flacks wrote:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 138-140 and 144.

Our hope is human freedom. We seek a society in which men have, at last, the chance to make the decisions which shape their lives. Our quest is for a political and economic order in which power and plenty are used for the widest social benefit, a participatory democracy in which men can come to know each other and themselves as human beings in the fullest sense.¹¹⁰

What Flacks and the rest of SDS did not know at that time was that there was to be a group of radical organizers who were to descend on the poor communities of Cleveland, Ohio and carry out their ideas, their hopes, and their dreams of participatory democracy in a practical and effective technique that survived the mass blunders of the ERAP national office.

¹¹⁰ Students for a Democratic Society, "From *America and the New Era*", *Cleveland Community Project Newsletter*, (October, 1964), vol. 1, no. 1, SDS-2B, reel 15, number 95.

Acronyms

CCP - Cleveland Community Project

CORE – Congress of Racial Equality

CUFAW – Citizens United for Adequate Welfare

ERAP – Economic Research and Action Project

LID - League for Industrial Democracy

NO – National Office (SDS)

NWS – Near West Side (Cleveland)

PREP – Peace Research and Education Project

SDS – Students for a Democratic Society

SLID – Student League for Industrial Democracy

SNCC – Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

UAW – United Auto Workers

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